

FEBRUARY 5, 2008

KAREN S. MITCHELL  
CLERK, U.S. DISTRICT COURTIN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
AMARILLO DIVISION

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JOEL RODRIGUEZ CANTU, PRO SE,	§	
TDCJ-CID No. 1106804,	§	
	§	
Plaintiff,	§	
	§	
v.	§	2:07-CV-0166
	§	
F. BAXTER, D. PATEL, PAULA SEITZ, and	§	
S. WHITAKER,	§	
	§	
Defendants.	§	

**MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER OF DISMISSAL**

Plaintiff JOEL RODRIGUEZ CANTU, acting pro se and while a prisoner confined in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Correctional Institutions Division, has filed suit pursuant to Title 42, United States Code, section 1983 complaining against the above-referenced defendants and has been granted permission to proceed in forma pauperis.

Plaintiff alleges that, on November 22, 2005, he was treated by defendant PATEL for “mild, flu like symptoms” with Cephalexin, 500 mg. 3 times a day. Plaintiff states his medical records reflect that he is allergic to penicillin and that he took the medication because he didn’t realize what it was. Plaintiff alleges he suffered an allergic reaction for three days which, despite three emergency visits to the infirmary on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005 went undiagnosed by defendants Nurse SEITZ and Nurse WHITAKER who failed to recognize the symptoms of plaintiff’s allergic reaction. Plaintiff says the doctor and nurses failed to admit he had a reaction, but he has suffered irreparable nerve damage in the form of sensory and motor peripheral neuropathy which is demyelinating in nature.

Plaintiff requests an award of monetary relief in the amount of \$750,000.00 to compensate him for physical and mental injury.

### **JUDICIAL REVIEW**

When a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity, the Court must evaluate the complaint and dismiss it without service of process, *Ali v. Higgs*, 892 F.2d 438, 440 (5th Cir. 1990), if it is frivolous<sup>1</sup>, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. 1915A; 28 U.S.C. 1915(e)(2). The same standards will support dismissal of a suit brought under any federal law by a prisoner confined in any jail, prison, or other correctional facility, where such suit concerns prison conditions. 42 U.S.C. 1997e(c)(1). A *Spears* hearing need not be conducted for every *pro se* complaint. *Wilson v. Barrientos*, 926 F.2d 480, 483 n.4 (5th Cir. 1991)<sup>2</sup>.

The District Judge has reviewed the facts alleged by plaintiff to determine if his claim presents grounds for dismissal or should proceed to answer by defendants.

### **THE LAW AND ANALYSIS**

“[D]eliberate indifference to serious medical needs of prisoners constitutes the ‘unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain’ . . . proscribed by the Eighth Amendment.” Such indifference may be “manifested by prison doctors in their response to the prisoner's needs or by

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<sup>1</sup>A claim is frivolous if it lacks an arguable basis in law or in fact, *Booker v. Koonce*, 2 F.3d 114, 115 (5th Cir. 1993); see, *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 112 S.Ct. 1728, 1733, 118 L.Ed.2d 340 (1992).

<sup>2</sup>*Cf. Green v. McKaskle*, 788 F.2d 1116, 1120 (5th Cir. 1986) (“Of course, our discussion of *Spears* should not be interpreted to mean that all or even most prisoner claims require or deserve a *Spears* hearing. A district court should be able to dismiss as frivolous a significant number of prisoner suits on the complaint alone or the complaint together with the *Watson* questionnaire.”).

prison guards in intentionally denying or delaying access to medical care or intentionally interfering with the treatment once prescribed.” *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 104, 97 S.Ct. 285, 291, 50 L.Ed.2d 251 (1976).

Deliberate indifference is defined as a failure to act where prison officials have knowledge of a substantial risk of serious harm to inmate health or safety. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 114 S.Ct. 1970, 1981, 128 L.Ed.2d 811 (1994). However, not every claim of inadequate or improper medical treatment is a violation of the Constitution, *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 105, 97 S.Ct. 285, 291, 50 L.Ed.2d 251 (1976); nor does a disagreement with a doctor over the method and result of medical treatment require a finding of deliberate indifference. *Spears v. McCotter*, 766 F.2d 179 (5th Cir. 1985). “[N]egligent medical care does not constitute a valid section 1983 claim.” *Mendoza v. Lynaugh*, 989 F.2d 191, 195 (5th Cir. 1993). Further, merely alleging that a prison doctor should have undertaken additional diagnostic measures or utilized an alternative method of treatment does not elevate a claim to constitutional dimension. *Varnado v. Collins*, 920 F.2d 320, 321 (5th Cir. 1991).

Plaintiff’s pro se complaint, even when liberally construed, states only claims of negligence against defendants PATEL, SEITZ, and WHITAKER. However, section 1983 is not a general tort statute, and mere negligence does not meet the standard for liability under section 1983. *Mendoza v. Lynaugh*, 989 F.2d 191, 195 (5th Cir. 1993); *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 331-34, 106 S.Ct. 662, 664-67, 88 L.Ed.2d 662 (1986). Plaintiff’s claims against these defendants lack an arguable basis in law and are frivolous. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 109 S.Ct. 1827, 104 L.Ed.2d 338 (1989).

As to defendant BAXTER, the Unit Health Administrator, plaintiff alleges that he is a supervisor and failed to send plaintiff to the hospital as plaintiff requested. To the extent plaintiff's claim is based on BAXTER's supervisory position, the acts of subordinates trigger no individual section 1983 liability for supervisory officers. *Champagne v. Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office*, 188 F.3d 312, 314(5th Cir. 1999). A supervisor may be held liable only when he is either personally involved in the acts causing the deprivation of a person's constitutional rights, or there is a sufficient causal connection between the official's act and the constitutional violation sought to be redressed. *Thompkins v. Belt*, 828 F.2d 298, 304 (5th Cir.1987); *Douthitt v. Jones*, 641 F.2d 345, 346 (5th Cir.1981) (*per curiam*). If plaintiff is attempting to allege that he asked BAXTER to send him to the hospital and BAXTER refused, plaintiff alleges no fact to show BAXTER was ever plaintiff's treating physician or had reason to know plaintiff needed to go to the hospital. Even if plaintiff personally informed BAXTER he felt he needed to go to the hospital, BAXTER is not required to accept plaintiff's opinion of his medical needs, and plaintiff does not allege any doctor or nurse made such a recommendation. Plaintiff has utterly failed to state a claim on which relief can be granted against defendant BAXTER.

### **CONCLUSION**

Pursuant to Title 28, United States Code, sections 1915A and 1915(e)(2), as well as Title 42, United States Code, section 1997e(c)(1),

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the Civil Rights Complaint filed pursuant to Title 42, United States Code, section 1983, by plaintiff JOEL RODRIGUEZ CANTU be DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE AS FRIVOLOUS AND FOR FAILURE TO STATE A CLAIM ON WHICH RELIEF CAN BE GRANTED.

LET JUDGMENT BE ENTERED ACCORDINGLY.

A copy of this Order shall be mailed to plaintiff and to any attorney of record by first class mail. The Clerk shall also mail copies of this Order of Dismissal to TDCJ-Office of the General Counsel, P.O. Box 13084, Austin, TX 78711; and to the Pro Se Clerk at the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

ENTERED this 5<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2008.

/s/ Mary Lou Robinson  
MARY LOU ROBINSON  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE